

Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Bruce Braley (IA-01) introduced a bipartisan bill to help get justice for victims of sexual trauma and assault in the military. The Support for Survivors Act would require the Department of Defense to ensure life-long storage of all documents connected with reports of sexual assaults and sexual harassment across the military branches. The legislation would also prevent the military from destroying any records relating to sexual assault.

“The men and women who serve our country need to know that their government is standing up for them,” said Rep. Braley. “Just earlier today I heard testimony from Linda Schwartz, the President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. She cited reports showing that 23% of women serving in combat areas report being victims of sexual assault perpetrated by other members of the military. That’s simply unacceptable, and we cannot allow it to continue. That’s why this bill will help our brave troops get justice if they’ve been victims of sexual trauma or assault while serving. It will ensure that our soldiers have every record they need to get the justice they deserve.”

Rep. Braley introduced the bill in the House today with Rep. Poe (TX-02), Rep. Pingree (ME-01) and Rep. Slaughter (NY-28). Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Claire McCaskill (D-MO) introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Currently, there is no coordinated policy across the military branches to ensure the preservation of records connected with sexual trauma. Long-term preservation of records would help victims in obtaining benefits and pursuing legal action.

In recent years, there has been an increase in reports of sexual assaults in the military. According to the Department of Defense, there were 3,158 official reports of sexual assaults in the military in 2010. Because most incidents are not reported to a military authority, the Pentagon estimates this number represents only 13 to 14% of total assaults.

The Support for Survivors Act would:

- Ensure that documents connected with reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military are preserved
- Ensure full privacy and identity protection for both the victim and the perpetrator
- Ensure life-long access by the service member to his or her personal documents
- Grant the VA access to documents only at the request of a service member, for the purpose of assisting with the processing of a disability compensation claim
- Allow the Department of Defense to review the data (but not the names of the individuals mentioned in the reports) to improve research and reporting.